

SERFDOM IN RUSSIA

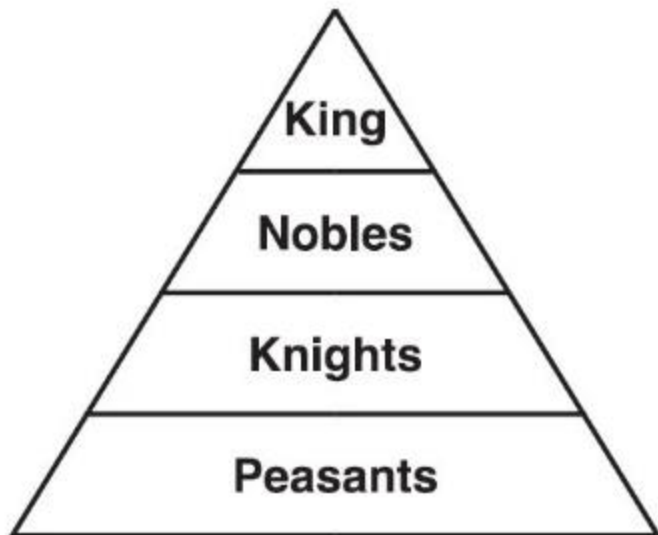


Presentation developed for the Center for Slavic and East European Studies at The Ohio State University by Kathryn Metz

WHAT IS FEUDALISM?

- Tsar gave land to the nobility
- Nobility repaid Tsar by serving in army
- Serfs worked the land and gave harvest to nobility in exchange for military protection.

European Feudal System



ORIGINS

- Began in Kievan Rus' in 11th Century
 - “*Russkaya Pravda*” – Russian Justice: a document from 1248 that was the source of Russian law and described how serfs should be treated
- Full serfdom achieved in 15th Century under Ivan III
 - No freedom of movement
 - Russian landowners had control over serfs
 - Serfs were taxed if they did not bring the harvest to their masters
- In Russia, serfdom only existed in central and southern Russia; not in the north nor in Siberia



LIFE AS A SERF

- Serfs were bought and sold by landlords
- Bound to land; leaving land was criminal offense
- Some serfs were owned by the State, and others by private individuals
- Serfs worked in Russian factories in the 1800s
- Russian army conscripted serfs to serve in military

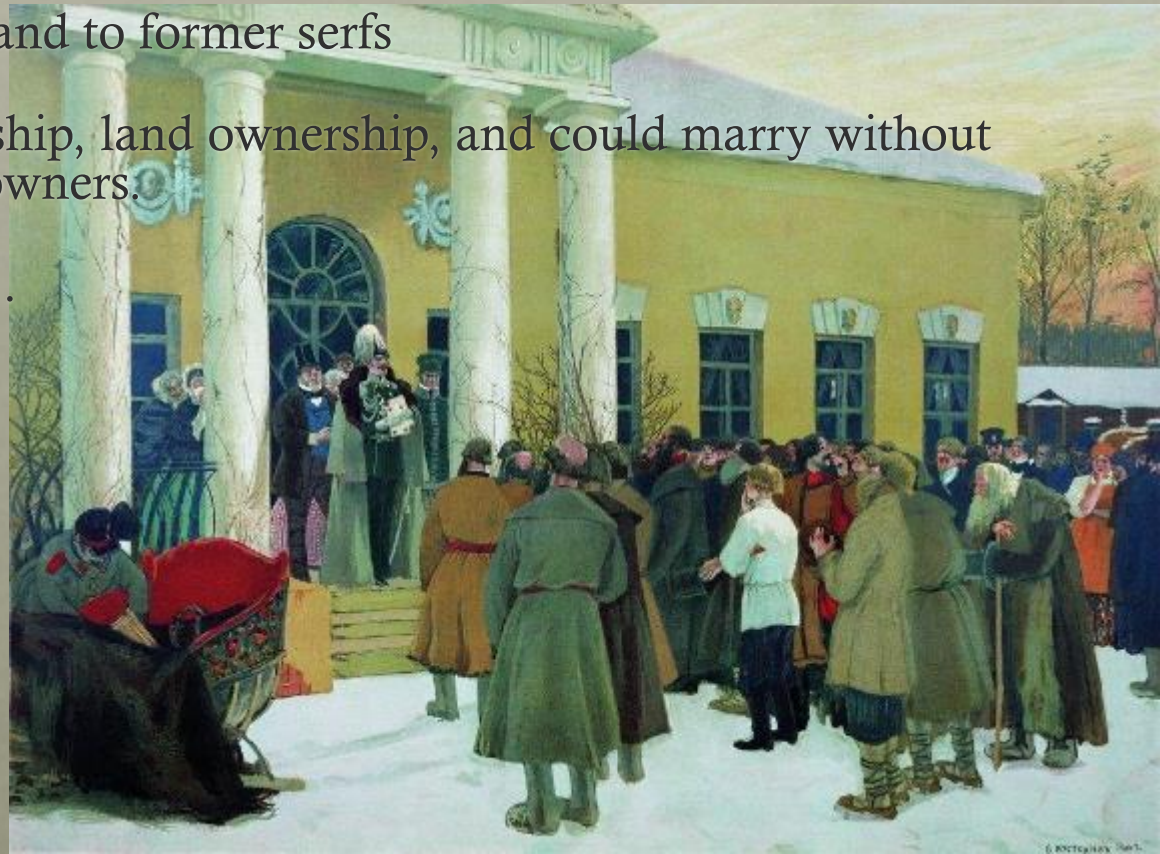


EMANCIPATION OF RUSSIAN SERFS, 1861

- Tsar Alexander II lost the Crimean War
 - Realized Russia's military was no longer a world power
 - Russia was backwards
 - Russia's serf based military and economy could not compete with the technological and industrialized West
- Alexander II told the nobility: "It is better to abolish serfdom from above than to wait for the time when it will begin to abolish itself from below."
- Alexander II introduced liberal reforms and freed the serfs in 1861
- 23 million serfs were freed

EMANCIPATION MANIFESTO

- Freed serfs on farms and in households
- Former serfs had right to own land
- Villages had right to distribute land to former serfs
- Freed serfs had rights to citizenship, land ownership, and could marry without needing permission from their owners.
- However, there were problems...



PROBLEMS WITH FREEDOM

- Household serfs received no land, only freedom
- Freed serfs given less land than they needed to survive
- “redemption tax” was so high that they had to sell all their grain to pay it
- For several years, famine struck many parts of Russia

RUSSIAN SERFS VS. AMERICAN SLAVES

- Compare and contrast life as a Russian serf with life as an American slave.